NAJIBULLAH/By Nancy Hatch Dupree

A prominent Afghan politician,. Najibullah (born 1947) was choosen on 4 May 1986 to succeed Babrak Karmal as Soviet-controlled ruler of the Republic of Afghanistan.

Najibullah (meaning "Honored of God") has frequently dropped the religious suffix "ullah" when it was politically expedient for him as a leftist to do so. He sometimes uses the medical title Dr., but has not used his military titles of Brigadier and Lt.-General, conferred in 1982 and 1983.

From a moderately prosperous family belonging to the Pushtun Ahmadzai sub-tribe of the Ghilzai residing in Milan, their ancestral village located between the town of Said Karam and Gardez, capital of Pakhtya Province, Najibullah was born in Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul, in August 1947. Six of the thirteen children in the family survive: two brothers work with the Kabul government, another, Siddiqullah, defected to the resistance in 1988; two sisters live in Afghanistan. His wife, Fatanah, a headmistress, belongs to the royal line of King Amanullah (1919-1929). They have three daughters.

Najibullah's father, Akhtar Mohammad Khan (d. 1983), served during the 1960s as Afghan Trade Commissioner and Consul in Peshawar, Pakistan, where he established friendly ties with

prominent Pakistani Pushtun tribal leaders, including the late Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who, with his son, Wali Khan, consistently supported leftist Kabul regimes in opposition to official Pakistani policy. A frequent holiday visitor to Peshawar during his father's tenure, Najibullah maintained these contacts to good advantage.

After graduating from Kabul's Habibiya Lycee (1964), he entered the Faculty of Medicine of Kabul University in 1965 and received a medical degree in 1975 after numerous interruptions, including two periods in prison (1969, 1970), because of his political activities during this period of liberal political experimentation in Afghanistan.

The leftist Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was launched on 1 January 1965 the same year they won three seats in the Lower House of Parliament during the first elections held under the 1964 Constitution. Among them was Babrak Karmal who broke away in 1967 to form the Parcham faction in opposition to his Khalq rivals within the party. This continuing and widening split had more to do with conflicting personalities, family relationships and urban-rural origins than ideology, although Parcham emphasized party unity and dialogue with national forces rather than the classic Marxist class struggle promoted by Khalq.

Najibullah, who joined the PDPA shortly after its creation, became a devoted follower and preeminent disciple of Babrak, acting as a trusted bodyguard, writer for the

newspaper Parcham and principal organizer of the largely Parcham-inspired radical student demonstrations and strikes which beset Kabul during the late 1960s. Hard-working, self-assertive and intensely involved, the imposingly tall and burly Najibullah acquired the pejorative nickname of Najib the Bull, yet numbers of his classmates in exile today attribute their survival to the bonds of friendship established during these student days.

The disputes between Parcham and Khalq were bitter but these were set aside ten years later when the two factions reunited in July 1977 to oppose the government of Mohammad Daud who had accepted Parcham's participation in staging a coup on 17 July 1973 only to remove them from his administration over the following years. Najibullah was appointed an ordinary member of the PDPA Central Committee at the time of the 1977 reunion.

Less than a year later (27 April 1978) the PDPA staged a successful coup of its own and with their assumption of power Najibullah's ambitious climb to the pinnacle began as he was promoted to the Revolutionary Council (1978), Secretary Central Committee and Director-General State Information Service, KHAD, (1980-1985), Politburo (1981), General-Secretary PDPA (1985) and President (1986).

The path to the summit, however, was far from smooth for the deep rifts within the party resurfaced almost immediately

after the coup. In July 1978 when most of the Parcham leadership was diplomatically exiled by Khalq, Najibullah was sent as Ambassador to Iran, a post he held only until October when he was dismissed and subsequently expelled from the party for alleged complicity in an attempt to overthrow the Khalqis in Kabul. Remaining at large, reportedly in Eastern Europe and the USSR, he was brought back to Afghanistan in the wake of the December 1979 Soviet invasion when Babrak Karmal was elevated to Prime Minister and General-Secretary of the PDPA.

The Soviet invasion was largely occasioned by the inability of the PDPA to put down the burgeoning armed resistance which threatened to collapse the Khalqi government. The identification of dissidents and the need to undermine and divide the resistance became key priorities which were undertaken by the Soviet KGB through its reorganization of the Afghan intelligence services to form KHAD (Khedmati Etal'at-i Daulati), the State Information Service. KHAD became the state's most effective - and dreaded - control institution and, as Director-General, Najibullah possessed great power, managing an enormous budget, up to 30,000 employees, 100,000 paid informers and an army division complete with helicopters and tanks. KHAD was, as it was described by an Afghan, a state within the state.

Neither the harsh methods of KHAD nor the massive war efforts of the Soviet Union were able to diminish the success of the resistance which was bolstered by international military

assistance. Babrak's faction-rent government proving entirely ineffective, the Soviets moved to select Najibullah as his replacement on 4 May 1986. This led the pro-Babrak forces within Parcham to further splinter the leadership and Najibullah was unable to stablize the situation despite efforts to legitimize and popularize his regime through renewed calls for reconciliation and concessions regarding Islam, economic liberalism and political pluralism, as well as many ploys to turn resistance leaders and win over tribal groups, minorities and religious leaders.

Growing Soviet disillusionment with the Kabul leadership, added to numerous others factors including changes taking place in the Soviet Union, ultimately led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in February 1989 when it was generally predicted that Najibullah would quickly fall. However, enormous Soviet military and economic aid - estimated at $300 million a month - continued to flow into Afghanistan and although Parcham-Khalq internecine infighting still raged, Najibullah retained his position with his usual outward air of self-assured confidence. Although far from popular, he adroitly maneuvered his political opponents inside and outside Afghanistan.

Thus, in the mid-1990 internationally brokered search for a peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan Najibullah represented the major obstacle: the United States insisted on his removal before initiating interim arrangements; the Soviet Union pressed for his retainment.

For the period and the man, see the following: J. Bruce Amstuz, Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation (1986); Raja Anwar, The Tragedy of Afghanistan (1988); Amin Saikal and William Maley (eds.), The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan (1989).